

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson*****U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation:
Next Steps for the Merida Initiative***

May 27, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee and the Committee on Foreign Affairs' Western Hemisphere Subcommittee joint hearing on *US-Mexico Security Cooperation: Next Steps for the Merida Initiative*:

"Over the last several years, the Committee on Homeland Security has examined the issue of border violence and the role of the U.S. government in confronting one of the principal causes of the violence – drug trafficking organizations. The Department of Homeland Security and its numerous law enforcement partners have battled these organizations for years, but many challenges remain.

The Mexican government has scored significant victories against drug trafficking organizations, but the crackdown has fueled an escalation in violence throughout Mexico and along our shared border. In the last three years alone, there have been over 22,000 drug-related murders in Mexico.

Unfortunately, our Nation is not immune to the violence. American citizens have been killed in Mexico and individuals associated with the U.S. consulate in Juarez were murdered earlier this year. At the same time, Americans are increasingly concerned about the potential for increased violence on the U.S. side of the border. It is all too clear that drug trafficking and violence is not just Mexico's problem; it is also an American problem.

We must do more to combat these problems on this side of the border. President Obama's announcement this week regarding National Guard personnel and supplemental funding for the border is an acknowledgment of that concern. I applaud his ongoing commitment to securing the region. Regarding Mexico, over the last three years Congress has appropriated \$1.3 billion for the Merida Initiative for vital equipment and training.

However, to date Mexico has received only a fraction of the funding the U.S. has pledged for the program. In fact, records show Mexico has received just \$161 million of the \$1.3 billion appropriated so far. It is critical that we review existing processes to ensure that this assistance is being provided as efficiently as possible, while still ensuring accountability.

That brings us to the question before us today: "What is next for the Merida Initiative?" As we move forward with the next stage of U.S.-Mexico security cooperation, we must build on the lessons learned over the last three years.

I understand the assets and experience the Department of Homeland Security brings to the table on these matters. I would like to see DHS play a greater leadership role in U.S.-Mexico security cooperation going forward.

I also look forward to a dialogue on the challenges facing Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico border region, and how best to confront those challenges to have a more secure future."

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